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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

RELEASED

GENERAL GOVERNMENT
DIVISION

MAY 11 1977

B-114874



The Honorable J. Bennett Johnston
United States Senate

Dear Senator Johnston:

Your February 4, 1977, letter requested an update of our October 29, 1976, report on the quality of mail service in Louisiana. In that report we pointed out a number of actions the Postal Service had taken or proposed to improve mail service in Louisiana. With the exception of the installation of a letter sorting machine scheduled for April 1977 in Shreveport, these actions have been completed. However, mail delivery performance in Louisiana under the Service's normal delivery commitments has declined during the one-year period subsequent to our previous review. Delivery performance statistics comparing available 1977 data with that in our previous report indicated that under the upgraded commitments mail service has improved for overnight area mail and declined for 2- and 3-day area mail.

DELIVERY PERFORMANCE IN LOUISIANA

First-class mail delivery performance in Louisiana has declined. As you will recall, delivery performance is measured by the Postal Service in terms of its ability to meet commitments for overnight, 2- and 3-day delivery. The Service's goal is to meet these commitments 95 percent of the time.

Using Service reports, we have summarized the Service's first-class mail delivery performance in Louisiana under normal commitments and under the upgraded delivery commitments of the Service Improvement Program. Under normal commitments, mail delivery performance in Louisiana for the year ending December 31, 1976, was lower than the one-year period covered in our previous review. The following table shows the comparison.

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Percent of Louisiana mail delivered on time
(note a)

	<u>Year ending 1/2/76</u>		<u>Year ending 12/31/76</u> (note b)	
	<u>Origin</u>	<u>Destination</u>	<u>Origin</u>	<u>Destination</u>
Overnight	95	95	94	94
2-day	94	94	92	92
3-day	90	91	88	88

a/The percentages used are a composite of the performance percentages of the nine sectional center facilities within Louisiana.

b/Data for the 3-month period March 27, 1976 through June 18, 1976 was not available.

A comparison of the December 31, 1976, data with that of the Southern Region and the Nation disclosed mail delivery performance in Louisiana was generally below regional and national performance in overnight area mail and always below in 3-day area mail. However, 2-day area mail performance was generally equal to or better than regional and national performance.

While the table above deals with the entire State, the following data shows the delivery performance for each of the nine sectional center facilities 1/ in Louisiana for overnight, 2- and 3-day areas.

1/ A sectional center facility is a mechanized mail handling facility for processing incoming and outgoing mail for peripheral local post offices in a designated service area.

Delivery performance for Louisiana
sectional center facilities
for the year ending December 31, 1976

<u>Area</u>	<u>Overnight</u>		<u>2-day</u>		<u>3-day</u>	
	<u>Origin</u>	<u>Destination</u>	<u>Origin</u>	<u>Destination</u>	<u>Origin</u>	<u>Destination</u>
New Orleans	91	92	90	89	89	90
Thibadaux	90	87	95	97	85	91
Hammond	93	93	88	90	85	90
Lafayette	97	96	92	93	85	90
Baton Rouge	95	94	92	91	89	87
Alexandria	97	96	94	94	90	89
Lake Charles	95	98	93	95	82	91
Shreveport	95	94	94	93	92	84
Monroe	96	95	92	91	84	85

This table shows that not all geographical areas receive the same level of service. For example, a large volume area such as New Orleans has a lower performance score than many of the other Louisiana facilities. This large volume, which fails to meet the Service's goals, impacts greatly on the state-wide statistics and overshadows areas where higher scores are achieved yet the volume is generally much lower.

Our earlier report discussed delivery performances under the Service Improvement Program--a program which eliminated airmail and upgraded service commitments of first-class mail. We reported that Louisiana's success in meeting test commitments was slightly lower than its success in meeting normal commitments.

Delivery performances under the upgraded commitments have improved for overnight area mail and declined for 2- and 3-day area mail. The following table compares delivery performances detailed in our October 29, 1976 report with more recent data.

Percent of Louisiana mail delivered
on time under the Service
Improvement Program (note a)

	As detailed in our 10/26/76 report		Accounting period 4 (note b)	
	<u>Origin</u>	<u>Destination</u>	<u>Origin</u>	<u>Destination</u>
Overnight	89	94	94	94
2-day	92	90	88	85
3-day	87	92	86	89

a/The percentages used are a composite of the performance percentages of the nine sectional center facilities within Louisiana.

b/January 1, 1977, to January 28, 1977. Data for other accounting periods was not available.

Two other comparisons were made with the data available for the Service Improvement Program. First, Louisiana data was compared with that of the Southern Region and the Nation. Mail delivery performance was equal to national and below regional performance for overnight areas and generally below regional and national performance for 2- and 3-day areas.

Second, the available data was compared to the same period last year. This comparison showed that mail delivery performance for overnight areas was equal to last year's performance while the 2- and 3-day areas were below last year's performance.

Service officials told us that as a result of the cancellation of some air transportation to New Orleans, mail destined for the New Orleans State Distribution Center was not arriving in sufficient time for processing in order to meet delivery commitments. The officials said that, in all probability, delivery commitments will have to be revised downward because of the reduction in air service.

Revising delivery commitments downward should help Louisiana's delivery performance statistics but will not

improve service. What the action will do is provide postal patrons with a better idea of how long it will take for their letters to be delivered.

STATUS OF POSTAL SERVICE ACTIONS
PROMISED IN OUR EARLIER REPORT

In October, we reported on several actions the Service had taken or proposed to improve mail service in Louisiana. We recently asked the Service for the status of those actions.

We were informed that to help alleviate the crush of mail arriving at New Orleans, 9 percent of the 2- and 3-day mail has been diverted from New Orleans to Shreveport. This represents mail destined for Louisiana from all states in the Southern Region except from the following zip code locations.

<u>Location</u>	<u>First 3 digits of ZIP Code</u>
Florida	320-339
Oklahoma	730-749
Mobile, Alabama	365-366
Part of Tennessee	370-372; 382-385
Part of Mississippi	369; 387-397

Service officials also informed us that the capacity of letter sorting machines at Baton Rouge and Shreveport is being increased. A six-position machine in Baton Rouge was expanded to 12 positions. This change combined with a similar conversion performed earlier increased capacity 33 percent. Shreveport scheduled converting an eight-position letter sorting machine to 12 positions for April 1977, to go along with the 12-position machine already in place. This will increase capacity by 20 percent.

Although the machine capacity will increase in both cities, mail processing at Baton Rouge and Shreveport will remain virtually unchanged except for future plans to process city secondary mail on the letter sorting machines instead of manually. This change should result in increased productivity in that both cities will be able to process more pieces per hour.

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As requested by your staff, we did not obtain formal agency comments. If we can be of further assistance, please let us know.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Victor L. Lowe". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Victor L. Lowe
Director